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Concluding Observations

Wilfried Swenden and Bart Maddens

As we have analyzed the dynamics of territorial party politics in some significant West European countries, we wish to consider to what extent our findings support the theoretically informed expectations that were formulated in the introduction. Our concluding observations are formulated by linking them directly to the relevant hypotheses, and therefore may not respect the order of the empirical chapters in this book.

[A] The ‘nationalization thesis’ reconsidered and the relationship between the regionalization of the state and the denationalization of the multi-level party system

[B] Testing ‘nationalization’

In the introduction we did not criticize the empirical evidence presented by the most significant party system nationalization studies, but we raised two significant concerns. First, the ‘nationalization thesis’ is counterintuitive, especially for countries such as Belgium, Spain, Italy (and, following unification even Germany) which decentralized their state structures in recent decades. Except for Belgium, these are all large and populous West European states. Hence, a longitudinal and detailed study of the extent to which the (multi-level) party systems of some of these states have (de)nationalized could shed a different perspective on the ‘party system nationalization thesis’ in Western Europe as a whole (Caramani 2004). Second, we argued that such a test would benefit if it were to study party

systems as ‘multi-level’ party systems and therefore also take results for regional elections into consideration.

Two contributions to this volume address these concerns in some depth. The first contribution, by Kris Deschouwer analyzed developments in the *statewide* party systems of Belgium and Spain. The federalization or regionalization of these states since 1980 is undisputable and in light thereof a denationalization of their statewide party system could be anticipated. Yet, Deschouwer does not find sufficient evidence to confirm this expectation. In Belgium, the Dutch and French-speaking statewide party systems, while noticeably different in the relative electoral strength of each party family member have *not* grown much further apart since the early 1980s (the outcome of the most recent federal election of 2007 notwithstanding). A similar pattern was observed in Spain: the results for Spanish general elections have not become more de-nationalized. In fact, compared with previous statewide elections, the results for the last election to be included in the analysis (March 2004) are the most distinctive in just two of the seventeen autonomous communities.

Deschouwer’s observations are based on an analysis of developments in the statewide party system alone. Hough and Koß pursue a comparable exercise for the German case but also incorporate regional election results. Their paper serves two purposes: first to test whether German voters have displayed increasing regional differences in the party which they vote for in statewide elections (to test the nationalization thesis); second to analyze whether German voters increasingly display multi-level voting behavior, and by doing so reduce the second orderness of German regional elections. With respect to the first objective, both authors find sufficient evidence of de-nationalization: unlike in Belgium and Spain, the German statewide party system has denationalized after 1990, albeit that volatility patterns are much reduced if we consider movements within party blocs rather than between individual parties. With respect to the second objective, Hough and Koß find evidence of an increasing

‘de-coupling’ between statewide and Land elections: how a party performs regionally in statewide elections has become a less reliable predictor for how it will perform in the nearest Land election. Their findings suggest that German regional elections no longer display all the characteristics of second order elections: although there may be lower turnouts still and an increased tendency to vote for smaller parties in regional elections compared with statewide elections, regional voters may also become increasingly mobilized on regional issues.

The analysis of the German multi-level party system raises three important questions: first: to what extent is the ‘de-nationalization’ of the German statewide party system a rather isolated phenomenon that can be attributed to unification? Is unification an important ‘critical juncture’ that strengthened the territorial heterogeneity of Germany in socio-economic terms, triggered more regionally diversified voting patterns in statewide elections and increased the extent of multi-level voting? The data show that unification intensified electoral volatility and reduced the evenness of regional support for the large statewide German parties, especially as a result of the success for the PDS in East Germany. Second, is this pattern set to continue or are we in fact witnessing a partial ‘Easternization’ of the West German party system, due to the electoral breakthrough of an all German Left Party and the narrowing gap between East and West German voters in terms of volatility, at least in statewide elections? In this sense, we could witness the stabilization or at least a partial ‘re-nationalization’ of the German statewide party system in the short term? Finally, is the rise of multi-level voting replicated across those West European states whose statewide party systems have not become more denationalized (such as Belgium and Spain)? Although the contributions to this volume do not consider this last question, in recent years several authors analyzed the scope of ‘multi-level voting’ in the UK and Spain (Trystan, Scully and Wyn Jones 2003, Hough and Jeffery 2006b; Pallarés and Keating 2006). These studies demonstrate the presence of ‘dual’ and multi-level voting. However, in Spain the degree of multi-level voting varies considerably between the

autonomous communities and does not seem to have *increased* since the early 1990s (see Hough and Jeffery 2006b, Palláres and Keating 2006). Combining the evidence presented in this volume, and the analysis of regional electoral behavior mentioned above, it seems that a homogenization of electoral results in statewide elections does not frequently coincide with a heterogenization of electoral outcomes in regional elections. This statement remains to be tested among a much larger group of statewide and regional elections, but if true, it would undermine a key assumption of our introduction.

[B] Developments in the Party System and Authority Migration

The contributions by Deschouwer, Hough and Koß enable us to assess the relationship between the migration of authority (centralization or decentralization) within the state and the (de)nationalization of the party system. Chhibber and Kollman's work (2004) suggests that both aspects are directly related. The evidence presented in these chapters does *not* bear this out. In fact, the gradual process in which Belgium and Spain have become *federalized or highly regionalized* states is not paralleled by an equally spectacular *denationalization* of their party systems. Arguably, in Belgium the denationalization of the party system was already complete when the country took its first steps into federalizing the state. The break up of the statewide parties removed the most crucial mechanism for aggregating votes from the regional to the statewide level. Yet, after they had split, both parties of the same family (e.g. Flemish and Francophone Social-Democrats, Flemish and Francophone Christian-Democrats, etcetera) generally moved in similar directions while the state continued to decentralize. The 2007 elections may be a turning point insofar as the difference between the Dutch-speaking and Francophone party systems is increasing. This could be a consequence of the uncoupling of statewide and regional elections since 2003, and especially the asymmetries in the party

political composition of the federal and regional governments. Similarly, in Spain, major shifts in the migration of authority to the regional levels occurred in the 1990s although the Spanish statewide party system did not become particularly more denationalized in that decade. Conversely, the denationalization of the German party system did not immediately generate a more decentralized federation, at least not in formal terms. Constitutional change did not take place until the formation of a federal 'Grand Coalition' (CDU/CSU-SPD) government in 2005. Overall, these findings suggest three important conclusions.

First, there is no straightforward correlation between authority migration and party system nationalization: state decentralization can coincide with a stabilization or even relative nationalization of the (statewide) party system. Conversely, a denationalizing party system does not necessarily coincide with a decentralizing state at least not in formal or constitutional terms. For instance, while Detterbeck and Jeffery suggest that recent and pending constitutional reforms shift German federalism into a more decentralizing direction, not all parties that have contributed to denationalizing the party system (in particular the PDS) support, let alone, stand to benefit from a more denationalized federation. Furthermore, constitutional reforms take more time to register than shifts in electoral behavior, especially in a federation like Germany where the Länder can exercise a collective veto right in the centre through the Bundesrat and the federal majority parties do not necessarily capture a majority of seats in the second chamber.

Second, the findings do not lend support to the assumed *direction* of the relationship between authority migration and the (de)nationalization of the party system. Changes in the structure of the state do not necessarily trigger changes in the party system, as Chhibber and Kollman have argued (Chhibber and Kollman 2004). In Belgium, the parties had almost entirely split *before* the state embarked upon a process of federalization, and in Spain too, the formative elections of the late 1970s and early 1980s immediately demonstrated the success

of autonomist parties. Therefore, in Belgium, an increasing regional divergence of electoral results and swings seems to have *caused* institutional regionalization and not the other way around. At least until 2007, institutional regionalization may have contained the further denationalization of voting in statewide elections. In Spain too, some of the autonomist parties have played an influential role in decentralizing the state, especially when the political opportunity structure to weigh on national politics was there, i.e. when a national minority government relied on their support. Progressive steps to further strengthen the powers of the Spanish regions may have prevented a further increase in their support or in the extent to which votes for statewide parties are spread homogeneously across the regions of the state and thereby *contained* rather than increased a denationalization of voting.

Finally, the findings suggest that changes in the (de)centralization of the state or the (de)nationalization of the party system are often linked to broader societal developments which restructure the nature or change the relative importance of territorial cleavages. For instance, as Verleden illustrates in his chapter on Belgium, the decreasing salience of the ideological divide between Catholics and non-believers after World War II, coupled with a reversal of economic fortunes (now benefiting the Dutch-speaking Flemish population) gave a different meaning to long-standing Flemish demands for more cultural autonomy. The language divide became a more ‘attractive’ cleavage on which to mobilize support. The rise of new political agents (autonomist parties) prompted a (radical) response of the statewide parties. In turn, their break-up along linguistic lines and thereby also the breakup of the statewide party system as a whole paved the way for institutional reform, i.e. the institutions were adapted to the disintegration of the party system, which in turn was caused by structural changes in society. Deschouwer’s data nicely support this link between party systemic and state systemic developments: an increase in the regional divergence of electoral results and swings disintegrates the statewide party system. Yet, after adopting regional and eventually

federal institutional devices, centrifugal tendencies in the statewide party system are again contained (notwithstanding a more recent upsurge of electoral heterogeneity). Unification has had a similar heterogenizing effect on the German party system (though the state systemic repercussions are still bearing fruit) since it generated a much more territorially heterogeneous society in which the East-West divide trumped an already present (but much less salient) divide between the rich Lander of the South, and some relatively poor Lander of the North (again, a reversal of fortunes, compared with the immediate post-War period). However, we should also warn against over-emphasizing the impact of changes in the importance of (domestic) territorial cleavages alone. For instance, in Italy, the North-South cleavage has been present throughout, yet remained without much political salience until the beginning of the nineties. This has changed drastically since then, although Italian society as whole had not become territorially more heterogeneous. The end of the Cold War, and the scandals surrounding the long term governing Christian- and Social-Democrats that triggered the implosion of the old party system, opened up a window of opportunity for the mobilization of electoral support along the territorial cleavage. The Lega Nord quickly filled this void.

[A] Statewide Parties and the Challenge of Multi-Level Politics: Party Organization & Policy

Statewide parties provide by far the most important element of linkage between the statewide and the regional party systems. Therefore, the more successful these parties in garnering electoral support across the regions of the state in statewide and regional elections, the higher the integration of the party system.

In the section we focus on two important questions. First, to what extent are the organization, strategies and policies of the state-wide parties related to the processes of state

(de)centralization and party system (de)nationalization? Second, insofar as there is a causal link between each of these processes (party organizational adaptation, party system nationalization and state decentralization) in what direction is it running? Before we discuss some findings in more detail, we summarize the overall tendencies that were found for our cases.

First, if we focus on the relationship between the statewide party organization and state (de)centralization alone, we have good reasons to expect a relatively decentralized state structure to coincide with a relatively decentralized statewide party organization. For instance, statewide parties which operate in a federal context not only organize for regional elections, but also vie for a position in regional office. Regional office in federal or regionalized states comes with potential access to important policy or expenditure resources, and generally requires a class of highly professionalized politicians. Each of these properties (even if the regional party branch of the statewide party is not likely to be elected into regional office) should strengthen the autonomy of regional party branches and their influence in the statewide party branch. Or to paraphrase Van Houten's 'principal-agent' paradigm, the higher the levels of territorial autonomy, the stronger the expected position of the 'regional' agent vis-à-vis the statewide principal.

Overall, the support that we find for these assumptions is very mixed at best. On the one hand, it is perfectly possible to have a relatively decentralized state in which the statewide parties have maintained a more centralized character. Spain illustrates this trend. The decentralization of the state has been orchestrated by two rather centralized parties, the Conservatives (PP) in particular. Although regional party leaders gradually built up capacity at home and in the statewide party branch, the level of regional branch autonomy still falls short of what could be expected based on the importance of autonomous communities within the state. On the other hand, Belgium and the UK illustrate the opposite trend; that is a

relatively centralized state may coincide with decentralized parties. As Verleden demonstrated in his contribution, the Belgian statewide parties had already started to disintegrate well before the regionalization of the Belgian state. Similarly, until the 1950s, the Scottish Conservatives operated as an almost quasi-autonomous branch within the Conservative Party, despite the rather centralized character of the UK state.

With regard to the second question, we observed that statewide parties not only *respond to* but also play an active role in shaping the territorial structure of the state. Indeed, statewide parties not only actively mould such reforms through processes of constitutional change, but they even hold their own organizational chart as a template against which to structure the territorial organization of the state. In this respect, Verleden's analysis provides an intriguing account. He shows how the formerly statewide Belgian parties exported 'consociational mechanisms' which served to bridge differences of opinion between the Dutch- and French-speaking party members to the institutional structure of the Belgian state. After the parties had split, these mechanisms lived on in structures that were devised to pacify relations between the Dutch- and Francophones within the still unitary Belgian state (Swenden and Jans 2006; Deschouwer 2006b). Hence, paradoxically, at the time when consociationalism was 'cut and pasted' onto the overall state-structure, the state-wide party system had almost broken down completely and the 'consociational' model had ostensibly failed as an instrument for accommodating intra-party territorial conflicts. In a similar vein, one may wonder whether one day the *Consejo Territorial* which advises the PSOE national president and party executive could serve as a useful template against which to model a reformed, and from the viewpoint of territorial representation, more significant Spanish Senate.

In the following section, we will elaborate in further detail on the relationship between the territorial organization of the state, the organization of statewide parties and especially the

strength of regional party branches therein. We not only discuss the organizational properties of statewide parties, but also how they campaign and make policy.

[B] The Territorial Structure of the State and How statewide parties organize and campaign

The contributors to this volume were asked to consider whether the territorial organization of statewide parties reflects three distinct dimensions of how a state is structured territorially; first, the functional or jurisdictional method of distributing competencies in the state (where we expect the regional party branches to be more involved in statewide party matters but also to be more constrained in regional party matters, the more competencies are distributed in a functional way); second, variations in the scope of regional self-rule (where we expect the autonomy of the regional party branches to increase with the scope of the regional autonomy) and finally, the presence of constitutional asymmetry (where we expect the autonomy of the regional branches to be higher and/or their participation in the statewide party to be stronger for those regions that have a higher degree of self-rule). The collected empirical evidence supports a relationship between each of these factors and the territorial organization of the statewide parties, but not always as strong as predicted. We consider each of these three hypotheses in turn.

[C] A jurisdictional or functional design

For instance, with regard to the relationship between a functional/jurisdictional federal design, and the territorial structure of statewide parties, we notice that under Germany's joint-decision or integrated federal system, regional executive leaders acquired an unusually strong input in the governance of the centre, through the collective veto power of the Bundesrat, the

federal second chamber. In parallel, regional party leaders obtained a high degree of influence in statewide party matters, a pattern that is replicated across each of the statewide parties. Although not as ‘functional’ as the German model, the method of distributing competencies between the centre and the regions in Spain also requires a considerable amount of co-operation between both levels. Likewise, devolution to Wales assumes a very high level of co-operation. Yet, in their comparative analysis Fabre and Mendéz-Lago note a lack of ‘shared rule’ provisions in the case of most Spanish and UK statewide parties. This lack of systematically integrating regional party branches in statewide party decisions parallels a failure to incorporate regional elites in the functioning of the central state, either via highly institutionalized channels of intergovernmental relations or through an effective and powerful second chamber (Bolleyer 2006; Roller 2002). One could make a case that the decision of the Spanish Socialists to create an (advisory) *Consejo Territorial* in which regional party leaders advise the party president on matters of regional importance strengthens the shared rule dimension somewhat. The regional branches of the UK parties are even less involved in statewide party matters than the Spanish regional party branches. Arguably, the weight of Scotland and Wales in the union is so small, that a strong involvement in the central party executive or strategic policy committees cannot be realistically expected. On the other hand, the lack of primary legislative powers for Wales requires strong channels of intra-party coordination, for instance at present between Welsh Labour and the UK Labour Party. Such channels exist, but only informally. Finally, Hopkin shows how in Italy, regional branches, and especially regional party leaders in executive office (governors) increased their capacity to influence statewide party policy. This happened, despite decentralizing reforms that seemed to have disentangled somewhat – at least formally – the statewide and regional layers of policy making by entrusting the latter with ‘exclusive’ autonomy in a larger area of competencies (except for their financing). However, the larger role of regional policy leaders

in the centre is attributed less to the rise in regional autonomy than to the direct election of the governors and their capacity to play an important ‘brokerage’ role in the clientelistic networks connecting party elites at the central and local levels.

The comparative contributions also demonstrate that regional branch participation in the state-wide party does not preclude a considerable level of regional party branch autonomy. Indeed, the substantial autonomy of the regional party branches in Germany contradicts our initial hypothesis that a highly co-operative or joint-decision making design implies a lesser degree of autonomy for the regional branches. The contribution by Detterbeck and Jeffery has shown that the degree of autonomy of the German regional party branches in selecting candidates, devising a party program for regional elections and determining regional coalition partners of their choice following regional elections is high notwithstanding their relatively strong participatory rights in the centre. Furthermore, the growing autonomy of regional party branches in recent years, is - at least for the time being – not offset by a parallel decrease of influence in the statewide party. Similarly, Ştefuriuc shows that German regional party leaders have not refrained from purposefully building or sustaining incongruent coalitions (i.e. coalitions that are different in composition from the coalition at the centre) when this was seen as benefiting the party in terms of policy or votes. For instance, in North-Rhine Westphalia, the CDU-FDP coalition remained in place, despite a federal coalition swap after the 2005 federal elections. Especially the NRW CDU perceived incongruence as an advantage that would shield the NRW coalition from unpopular federal decisions.¹ A similar capacity of German regional party branches to withstand federal party pressure is also shown by Van Houten in his analysis of the negotiations on the federal Solidarity Pact (1993). He shows how Länder governments with very different party political composition utilized the Bundesrat to joined forces and ‘defeat’ the CDU led federal government.

In comparison, the Spanish example illustrates that weaker ‘shared rule’ provisions frequently coincide with lower levels of regional party branch autonomy. Overall, Spanish statewide party branches keep a closer eye on the process of candidate selection; they impose ‘a framework program’ (*programma marco*) for regional elections and constrain regional party branches in their freedom to form the coalition governments of their choice. As a result, Spanish regional party branches find it harder to stand up against the statewide party line, even if they operate in a context where the need to do so is arguably higher, due to the lack of institutionalized intergovernmental coordination mechanisms that effectively channel territorial interests into the centre (as specified above). It follows that in Spain regional party branches or regional parties attach more importance to forming coalitions that are congruent with the central government. For instance, Ştefuriuc shows how the regionalists of the Canaries (CC) always preferred a coalition with the governing party in Madrid, due to their dependence on bilateral co-operation with the centre on regionally important policies such as health, fiscal matters, water policy, regional development (EU Structural Funds) or asylum policy. Therefore, the CC decided to expel the PP from the regional government of the Canary Islands shortly after the PSOE had entered the central government in 2004.

[C] The scope of decentralization

With regard to the second aspect of state decentralization, we can confidently state that by and large, the larger the scope of regional competencies, the higher the autonomy of the regional party branches. We can observe this pattern by considering the development of regional party branch autonomy across time, or by comparing regional party branch autonomy between states with different levels of regional autonomy. The chapters discussing regional party branch autonomy in the UK, Spain, Germany and Italy demonstrate that the *increase* of

regional autonomy within each of these states was never paralleled by a significant *decrease* in regional party branch autonomy. More likely, decentralization increased the profile and resources of regional party leaders and thus gave them additional capital to fight against statewide party interference. However, what these contributions also show is that the effect of decentralization does not play out uniformly across all statewide party organizations and may not manifest itself immediately. It can take considerable time before changes in how the state is governed transform long standing party practices and rules. For example, notwithstanding the presence of a ‘federal’ tradition in Germany which predates the Weimar republic, Detterbeck and Jeffery show that it took the Social-Democrats a considerable amount of time before they came to terms with a federal state structure. In fact, it was not until the party reformed its internal party structures in the late 1950s or early 1960s that its party organization came to reflect the German federal state structure in which the party operates. Conversely, the CDU ‘traveled’ in the opposite direction: the statewide party branch was weaker initially, but, reflecting the role of the CDU as the dominant party in federal government until 1966, it gradually increased its leverage. This centralizing ‘trajectory’ more or less made the CDU and SPD look alike in terms of the relative strength of their regional party branches. A similar time-lag effect can be observed in Bradbury’s analysis of candidate selection for devolved elections in the UK. Prior to the first devolved elections in 1999, the statewide Labour party heavily intervened in the process of candidate selection as candidates were tested on the extent to which they showed loyalty to ‘New Labour’ party principles. Some of these practices back-fired electorally (especially in Wales). In light thereof the party was inclined to give regional party branches a freer reign in pre-selecting candidates for subsequent devolved elections, albeit that it could also more easily set loose due to the long lasting effects of its ‘gun-boat’ interventions in 1999. A comparable ‘institutional learning’ effect has been observed for the UK Conservatives which even adapted a ‘confederal’

constitution in 2003 for streamlining UK-Scottish relations. In Spain too, the statewide party branches of PSOE and PP only ‘recognized’ the territorial organization of the state in recent years, especially by setting up Territorial Councils (PSOE) or Autonomous Councils (PP) with an advisory capacity.

[C] Asymmetry

Our contributions provide partial evidence to support the expected link between constitutional asymmetry and asymmetry in how statewide parties organize campaign or make policy. The evidence is most consistent for the UK, and especially for the Conservative Party. As Fabre and Mendéz-Lago demonstrate, the Scottish Conservatives are responsible for drafting ‘devolved’ parts of general election manifestos, whereas the British party devises matters in which Wales has obtained executive devolution leaving the Welsh party with autonomy to adapt the details of these policies to the Welsh context. The autonomy of the Scottish Conservatives in drafting manifestos for devolved elections is also higher than for the Welsh branch. Similar asymmetries were noted in the process of candidate selection, and again especially within the Conservative Party. In Wales the process of candidate selection for general elections is still supervised by a statewide election committee, while in Scotland a Scottish Candidate’s Board appointed by the Scottish Conservatives assumes this role. There is some evidence of asymmetry in the organization of the Spanish statewide parties as well, most notably in the peculiar position of the Catalan PSC and Navarrese UPN, both of which are semi-autonomous members respectively of the Spanish Socialist and Conservative families. However, apart from PSC and UPN, the other regional party branches are more or less treated in the same way, at least formally, even if some of them may appear under a different label in regional elections. Hence, the special status of the Basque Country or

Galicia (as historic communities) does not find special recognition in the structures of the leading statewide parties. Similarly, the asymmetric process of decentralization, especially during the first fifteen years of Spanish regionalism and again since 2005 did not produce more widespread asymmetry within the statewide party organizations. Likewise, in his contribution on the Italian statewide parties Hopkin does not make reference to higher levels of autonomy for those regional party branches which operate in regions with a special status. Sometimes, de facto autonomy of a regional party branch can be enhanced as a result of specific circumstances, for instance, the presence of a regional leader with high moral standing in the party (see further). Conversely, as Van Houten has demonstrated, the Spanish PSOE managed to turn the peculiar position of the Catalan PSC to its own benefit in order to secure statewide parliamentary approval for the highly contentious reform of the Catalan autonomy statute. The Catalan government and parliament, including the PSC, had ‘set the agenda’ by proposing a radical revision of the regional statute, but the status of the PSC as a formally distinct party enabled the governing PSOE to take some distance from this draft statute. Eventually, the central government successfully managed to water it down and threatened to cooperate with the CiU instead. In this case at least where more autonomy for the regional branch means quasi independence, it has not been paralleled by a stronger say in the politics of the statewide party. Even so, it is assumed that Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero has been instrumental in the ‘unseating’ of Pascal Maragall as President of the Catalan government. Such intrusive behavior of the PSOE in PSC matters runs against the common assumption of PSC autonomy.

Finally, the effects of institutional asymmetry can also be felt in the campaign messages of statewide parties in devolved elections. The issue of whether Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish autonomy should be extended concerns only a relatively small part of the electorate (even if it requires a decision of the Westminster parliament) whereas in Spain the

issue of regional autonomy affects the entire electorate. Therefore, in the UK statewide parties tend to give more attention to the issue of institutional regionalism and regional culture ('the regionalist issue') in regional elections compared to statewide elections, whereas in Spain statewide parties emphasize the regionalist issue more in statewide than in regional elections.

In sum, we can conclude that how statewide parties organize territorially reflects how the state is organized, but only partially so. Not all statewide parties which operate in the same territorial context may adjust their organizational structure or campaign strategies in the same way. Or, as Hopkin puts it, parties have their own internal organizational inertias. Furthermore, how they respond may derive from a set of unrelated variables: the broader dynamics of party competition, other institutional variables (for instance, a change in electoral rules for instance), or the legacy of party ideology, variables to which we turn next.

[B] Explaining variations in the territorial organization or strategy of statewide parties: Party Ideology and Party Development

So far, the analysis made clear that not all statewide parties adapt themselves in identical ways to the multi-leveled nature of party competition. In the introduction we focused on three potential explanatory variables which remain relatively stable across the lifespan of a party: ideology, party development and party type. We briefly discuss the effect of the first two of these variables on the territorial organization and strategies of statewide parties.²

[C] Party Ideology

We first assumed that party ideology serves as an important factor to explain the extent to which statewide parties are willing to embrace a federal type of party organization or

vary their campaign content. In states which have decentralized in recent decades, the internal organization of a party can sometimes be considered as a pre-figuration of a *desired* state structure, instead of as a reflection of the actual state structure. The ‘federal’ party structures of the British Liberals and the Spanish IU clearly illustrate this. Similarly, the internal structure of the Spanish PSOE bears more resemblance to a federal institutional design than the more centralized structure of PP, reflecting the PSOE’s stance in favor of a ‘federal’ Spain. On the whole, so we hypothesized in the introduction, Conservative and Labour ideologies are the least accommodative to recognize territorial differentiation within the state, while Liberal and Christian-Democratic ideologies are more favorable to territorial autonomy. The evidence only partially supports this assumption.

We take a look at the Conservative parties (of which there are two in our sample: the Conservatives in Britain and the Partido Popular (PP) in Spain) first. Fabre and Méndez-Lago show that while the British Conservatives were the least supportive of devolution at the time of the devolution referendums in 1997, they are certainly not the most centrally organized of the British statewide parties. For instance, the chairman or deputy chairman of the Scottish and Welsh Conservative branches are members of the statewide party executive; the regional branches have more than a consultative input in drafting the general election manifestos and they are entirely free to choose their own leaders. Regional branches in the Labour Party are comparatively weaker. In his contribution Bradbury demonstrates that the statewide Conservative Party seems to have interfered less in the process of candidate selection for general and devolved elections than the Labour Party. This somewhat higher level of regional autonomy is paralleled by the territorially more divergent campaign messages issued by the Conservatives compared with Labour and even the Liberals. For instance, on the occasion of the 1999 Welsh Assembly elections, the Welsh Conservatives strongly supported the Union, both with regard to the institutional and cultural dimensions. However, in 2003 the Welsh

Conservatives adopted a fairly intense regionalist position, marketing themselves as a more ‘Wales-friendly’ party. This U-turn – which was not imposed by the statewide party - was most conspicuous with regard to promoting the Welsh cultural identity, but it also involved a more favorable stance with respect to regional autonomy, notwithstanding the more skeptical position of the Conservatives in both the 1997 and 2001 general elections. In comparison, in Spain, the Partido Popular is clearly the most centralized of the large statewide parties. Unlike in the PSOE, the PP national President can prevent regional party leaders from occupying prominent positions within the national executive. Compared with the PSOE the Consejo Autonómico is a more recent and also less relevant body for injecting territorial concerns into the statewide party. The PP statewide branch is more likely to intervene informally in the drafting of provincial candidate lists; in the making of regional coalitions and in safeguarding the ‘internal cohesion’ of PP party politics within the autonomous communities. However, as for the Conservatives in Britain, we find some inconsistency in the content of their campaign messages with regard to the regionalist issue in statewide and regional elections. In statewide elections, the PP adopts a low intensity profile in favor of a strong centre, but in regional elections the PP takes a somewhat more regionalist position, though always with a large dose of ambiguity and without giving the issue much salience. Perhaps, as for the Welsh Conservatives, we may ascribe the inconsistency of the Spanish Conservative party to the nature of regional party competition which forces them into a more accommodative position with regard to the regionalist issue. Furthermore, while the regional PP branches may tend to cross-over to the regionalist side in regional elections, they also maintain a very low intensity – in line with their more centralist creed - and almost never surpass the PSOE which is ideologically more inclined towards decentralization. Overall, the PP regional manifestos diverge less from each other than the PSOE manifestos which may be due to a larger degree of central coordination or oversight by the PP statewide party branch.

Similarly, where Labour Parties compete against Christian-Democrats (as in Germany or Italy), the more ‘centralized’ nature of the former cannot always be taken as given. As discussed before, Detterbeck and Jeffery have shown that the German SPD was the least decentralized of the statewide parties in 1949, yet by 2007, its party organizational structures looked similar to that of the CDU. On the other hand, we find more evidence for the less centralized nature of the Christian-Democrats in Italy and Belgium. For instance, Hopkin, in his comparative treatment of the Italian statewide parties, illustrates the larger dependence of the DCI (Christian-Democrats) from regional and especially local support. In contrast, the national executive of the Socialist PSI was less dependent on similar support networks for intra party decision-making. Indeed, the PSI is perhaps the only example of a statewide party which centralized (under Craxi’s leadership between 1970 and 1990), while the Italian state moved into a more decentralizing direction. Finally, the Belgian case provides some indirect support for our hypothesis, insofar as the Belgian Socialist Party was the last of the three formerly statewide parties to split along linguistic lines, about a decade after the Christian-Democrats were the first party to break up.

Finally, we observe a similarly inconsistent pattern when comparing the two Liberal and both of the Communist or far-left wing parties among our sample. The strong support for a federal Britain is also fully reflected in the internal organization of the British Liberals. The regional branches of the Liberals are the best represented branches in the statewide party and, on paper they have the highest level of autonomy in candidate selection or policymaking. On the other hand, the German FDP is not more decentralized than the German Social-Democrats or Christian-Democrats. Similarly, although we expected Communist or far-left parties to adopt a centralized organizational structure, only the Italian Communists (PCI) fulfill this expectation. This is so notwithstanding a limited degree of decentralization since the late 1980s and especially 1990s (when the party transformed into the PDS). Yet, the contrast with

the Spanish IU (United Left) is strong. The IU has defined itself as a ‘federal’ party and has entrusted its regional branches with the largest degree of autonomy in candidate selection and in developing regional party policy of the Spanish statewide parties. On the other hand, as Ștefuriuc has shown, the IU sanctions regional branches that sign coalition deals without a priori consent of the statewide party. In this respect the IU is as centralized as the PP.

On the basis of the brief comparative reflections on the link between ideology and party organizational decentralization, we can conclude that party ideology cannot easily predict how parties organize internally, let alone how they diversify their campaign messages across the regions: Liberal parties are not necessarily the most decentralized, Socialist parties are not necessarily more centralized than Christian-Democratic parties etcetera. However, the absence of a clear link is primarily due to the weakness of ‘ideology’ as a solid *cross-national* predictor for a party’s preference with regard to how the state should be organized. There is in fact less contradiction between a party’s preference with respect to the territorial organization of the state and the territorial organization of the party. For instance, Social Democrats in Britain (who support devolution but not federalism), organize themselves in a devolved, rather than federal way, whereas Social-Democrats in Germany (who are supportive of the German federal state) organize themselves in a federal way. Or, to list another example, the Italian Communists were at least in the first years after WW II opposed to devolution or decentralization and adopted a very centralized party organization while their Spanish counterparts supported a decentralized state from the start and reflected this by organizing themselves in some respects as the most decentralized of all Spanish statewide parties. Admittedly, the Italian Communists became more supportive of devolution as early as the 1950s, when their exclusion from governance at the centre became obvious but developed some regional strongholds instead. The more important question then is: why is UK Labour less favorable to federalism than the German SPD, or why does the Spanish Left support a

federal Spain while the Italian communists, at least in the first years after World War II took issue with a devolved Italy?

[C] Party Development and Ideology as a Compass

One possible explanation for the divergent preferences of ideologically related parties with regard to the territorial structure of the state is their position on this issue when the contours of modern party development and competition were set. Hence, the pro-federal attitude of the UK Liberals could build upon a tradition of long term Liberal support for Home Rule (Ireland), which made it natural for the Liberals to capture this ideological space after the Second World War. For similar reasons, the pro-federal attitude of the Spanish United Left should not come as a surprise. The party was not formed until 1986, in a context when the - at that point somewhat centralizing PSOE – and the highly centralized Popular Alliance (later PP) defended a strong centre. The IU filled this void and simultaneously built upon a tradition of ‘resistance’ from below inherited from more than forty years of dictatorship. Furthermore unlike in Italy, meaningful regional parliaments or governments already existed when the IU was established. These regional institutions provided a useful opportunity structure from which to build up electoral support and statewide recognition.

If ideology cannot predict the extent to which statewide parties decentralize – at least not cross-nationally - statewide party ideology nonetheless functions as an anchor that prevents regional branches from drifting off too far from the statewide positions on regionalism. For instance, the comparative manifesto analysis demonstrated that in Spain ‘regionalism’ features more prominently in general than in regional elections, but it is also dealt with in a more ambiguous way. In regional elections the Spanish statewide parties, and particularly PSOE, are more explicit in their policy choices, mostly in an autonomist

direction. Since they may face strong competition of autonomist parties who exclusively address the electorate of the region, they reduce the level of ambiguity with regard to the institutional and identity components of regionalism. However, the difference with statewide elections is most substantial with regard to identity politics. A similar tendency was found in the UK, albeit that the regionalist issue received clearly more attention here in devolved than in UK elections. Yet as is in Spain, the manifestos for devolved elections particularly emphasized regional identity matters more than institutional matters. The more restrained attitude of statewide parties in supporting more regional autonomy compared with regional identity matters was also confirmed by a separate discourse analysis of the UK manifestos which showed that references to Britain are particularly scarce in the regional manifestos of state-wide parties. In sum, statewide parties counterbalance a moderately or ambiguously regionalist profile on the institutional dimension with the assertion of a strong identification with the region; a logical outcome since the political consequences of supporting regional identity and culture for the statewide party are small, whereas demands for more regional autonomy generate immediate political implications and are more likely to contradict the ideology and policies of the central party.

[B] Explaining variations in the territorial organization or strategy of statewide parties: incumbency, leadership and institutional reform

Ideological change and the institutional development of parties are long term processes, not events. Although they can have a profound impact on how parties organize, they take time to unfold. In this sense, they are different from relatively short term shifts in the territorial allocation of power within a party that come (or go) with more ‘sudden’ events such as the election of a party leader (though of course some leaders may remain in place for

a decade or even longer and may push through organizational reforms with long lasting legacies) or a party's position in government or in opposition. Such events can affect the territorial organization of statewide parties, if possibly only on a temporary basis. We should also emphasize that shifts in the balance of power between statewide and regional party branches that are linked to incumbency are not normally accompanied by statutory or party constitutional changes. Instead they could lead to a situation in which for instance statewide party leaders upon assuming central office revert to statutory (disciplinary) mechanisms that may have laid dormant when the party was in statewide opposition. More often, pressure or influence is conveyed through *informal* channels. For instance, the 'clientelistic' networks in Spain and Italy provide opportunities to reward loyal regional party behavior by pledging certain types of regional distributive aid to supportive regional party leaders, an instrument that cannot be used, or used much less effectively, when the party is in opposition. Conversely, the media exposure, access to resources and ability to make and implement public policy that comes with regional office strengthens the authority (and therefore also likely influence) of regional party leaders in the party as a whole

[C] Incumbency

Several authors stressed the (temporary) impact of incumbency on recalibrating power between the statewide and regional party branches. In the introduction we assumed that central office (combined with a position of regional opposition) is most conducive to statewide party influence in regional matters, while a position of regional incumbency (combined with statewide opposition) is likely to generate the largest degree of regional party branch autonomy and influence in the statewide party. Although we have not collected

systematic evidence to test this hypothesis for all statewide parties in each of the five West Europeans states, several authors provided supporting evidence for these assumptions.

For instance, in their comparative analysis of the Spanish and British statewide parties, Fabre and Mendéz-Lago argue that the statewide party branch of the Spanish Social Democrats kept a close eye on its regional party branches when the party was in power at the central level during much of the 1980s and first half of the 1990s. This was the case notwithstanding the influence of regional party barons in the statewide party. Both authors (and Bradbury) also attribute some of the more interfering tendencies of the British Labour Party to its uninterrupted control of Westminster since 1997. The interference of Labour in the process of candidate selection, especially on the occasion of the first devolved elections in 1999, illustrate the party's concern to uphold a 'uniform' party message across the country as a whole. Earlier, we suggested that the bad results for Labour in these elections, especially in Wales, could be attributed to such 'muddling' into regional party matters. However, these 'founding' elections took place without a 'regional incumbent' in place. The role of Labour as a party in office at the regional level hereafter strengthened the capacity and legitimacy of its regional party branches to fight or prevent similar displays of interventionism when selecting candidates for devolved elections in 2003. Furthermore, we assume that if Labour had been in central opposition, it would have been less inclined to supervise regional party matters.

The role of incumbency can also serve as an alternative explanation for the more limited divergence in campaign profiles for Labour in comparison with the other British statewide parties or for the PP in comparison with the PSOE. We initially assumed that statewide parties that are more centralized are less likely to tolerate territorially divergent campaign strategies than statewide parties with a more decentralized party organization. We found some evidence to support this assumption, but only in the Spanish case. The PSOE is ostensibly more decentralized than the PP and, perhaps as a result, its profiles on the

regionalist issue are the most territorially divergent. However, a similarly consistent pattern was not found for the UK. For instance, the divergence between the issue profiles of the manifestos of the Liberal Democrats proved to be smaller than the divergence for the Conservative party, notwithstanding the more decentralized party organization of the Liberal-Democrats. These findings could be explained by the incumbency status of Labour. The larger strategic leeway which the PSOE branches appear to have enjoyed may well have been due to that party's role in central opposition at the time of the 2001/2003 regional elections. This is consistent with the UK findings where Labour - as a party in central office – appeared to have tolerated less divergence in its issue profiles than the Conservatives who were in opposition at both levels, while the Liberal Democrats (who were in office at the regional level alone) occupied an intermediate position.

In their chapter, Detterbeck and Jeffery clearly show how *regional* incumbency, especially when it is combined with a role in central opposition, strengthens the influence of regional party leaders in the statewide party executive. This applies especially to the Social-Democrats and Christian-Democrats who (unlike the smaller coalition partners) can frequently lay claim to the most coveted post in Land politics: that of the Minister-president. Minister-Presidents are almost certainly members *ex officio* of the federal party executive and through their prominent role in the Bundesrat, or possibly even the bicameral Concertation Committee, they are bound to develop a strong 'federal' profile. Particularly after long periods in federal opposition, statewide party branches, such as that of the SPD in 1998, tend to recruit from several of their (formerly) regional party leaders to fill up ministerial posts in the federal cabinet. As a result the contingent of regional party leaders in the state-wide party presidium (i.e. the 'decision-making core' of the statewide party executive) usually shrinks substantially shortly after a party's assumes central office (Lehmbruch 2000; Swenden 2004).

The same tendency has been observed in the CDU after it was elected into federal power in 1982.

[C] Leadership

As argued above, statewide and/or regional leadership affects the relative strength of the statewide and regional party branches. For instance, the identification of Forza Italia with Silvio Berlusconi has been a strong centralizing force. The status of Kohl in the German CDU or of Felipe Gonzalez in the Spanish PSOE, at least during the first terms of their reign in central office may also have had a temporary centralizing effect. Conversely, the presence of regional barons within the Spanish Social Democrats, or the personal authority of Donald Dewar in the Labour Party or of Manuel Fraga in the Spanish Conservative party (PP) entrusted these regional leaders with a disproportionate level of influence in the statewide party. In the case of Dewar and Fraga, their personal history as influential ministers at the statewide level (in Fraga's case even as a founding member of the Popular Party) helped to maintain significant channels of influence at that level when becoming respectively First Minister of Scotland or President of the Galician government.

[C] Extra and Intra-Party institutional reform

Lastly, the relative strength of the central and regional party levels can be affected by institutional changes that have little or nothing to do with (de)centralization. Such changes can take place within the state and/or within the party. For instance, in their contributions, Hopkin and Bradbury discuss the effect of changing the electoral system on party (de)centralization, especially in the process of candidate selection. In 1993, the Italian

electoral system transformed from a largely proportional to a largely majoritarian one. However, the creation of single member electoral districts did not decentralize power within the statewide parties. On the contrary, the continued fragmentation of the party system compelled parties to form pre-electoral alliances to support each others candidates in single member contests. ‘This enhanced the role of parties’ national leadership in candidate selection, since reciprocal arrangements of *désistement*’ require coordination at a higher level than the electoral district’ (Hopkin: xxx). Or, as Bradbury shows, the parallel existence of constituency and list candidates raised new challenges for British parties in selecting candidates for Scottish and Welsh devolved elections, even if in this case, the level of statewide party interference more or less remained identical for selecting both sets of candidates. Another institutional measure that was raised in this volume is the direct election of regional presidents in Italy since 1995. This increased the legitimacy and profile of regional executive leaders and thereby strengthened their influence in the statewide party, even in highly centralized parties such as Forza Italia (as the influence of Lombardian regional president Formigoni attests).

Shifts in the relative influence of the regional party branches can also emerge as an (unintended) side effect of changing decision-making rules *within* a party. For instance, as Fabre and Mendez demonstrate, the introduction of individual secret ballot for the election of the party executive and secretary general of the PSOE reduced the capacity of regional party leaders to lobby for their preferred candidates. This was the case in 2000, when regional party leader José Bono lost the election for PSOE secretary general to Rodríguez Zapatero, notwithstanding the support of the former among a majority of the regional party leaders.

[A] Territorial Party Politics in Western Europe: concluding impressions and which way from here?

This volume brought together a number of contributions that focused on the territorial integration of the multi-level party system and the organization and strategies of statewide parties with respect to campaigning, policy-making or coalition building at the central and regional levels. What are in a nutshell the main conclusions that can be drawn from this research and where do we go from here?

Readers who were hoping to find unambiguous correlations or causal relations between the integration of the multi-level party system and the territorial organization and strategies of statewide parties may feel somewhat disappointed. In fact, the contributions show that there is no Grand Theory to explain the organizational or campaign strategy of statewide parties which operate in a multi-level electoral context. Statewide parties do not react in uniform ways to territorial party competition or shifts in authority migration within the state. Indeed, the assumption that we can simply measure ‘federalism by measuring parties’ as Riker once claimed is as straightforward as it is wrong (Riker 1975: 137). Not all statewide parties within a state adapt to territorial politics in similar ways. Some statewide parties may wish to hold a tight grip on the regional party branches even if it means adjusting campaign messages to specific regional desires. A statewide party that leaves its regional branches with too much autonomy risks becoming a bifurcated party, as has been the faith of several Canadian parties (Dyck 1997). Conversely a statewide party that holds too tight a grip on its regionalist branches risks falling into oblivion or spark the breakaway of a regional party branch. Statewide parties, do not provide uniform answers to this strategic paradox. However, there are some generalizations (arguably of lower theoretical ambition) that are worth reiterating.

First, we found a correlation between the domestic preferences of statewide party with regard to what the state structure should look like and their own organizational template. Cross-nationally, this works as a better predictor than party ideology, since not all Social-Democrats, Conservatives or Communists oppose decentralization and not all Liberal or Christian-Democrats favor it. Where parties stand often depends on where they stood on these issues when parties institutionalized and the party system was 'locked in'. On the other hand, parties can drift on the 'centre-periphery' axis of competition as much as they have drifted on the left-right axis.

Second, where the territorial design of the state enables regional party leaders to exert a strong influence in the politics of the centre, regional party branches also tend to assume a significant role in statewide party politics and retain a considerable level of regional autonomy. On the other hand, where the territorial design of the state does not provide the same mechanisms of 'intra-state federalism' (Smiley and Watts 1985), the position of the regional branches in the centre tends to be weaker as well. Where co-operation between both levels is nonetheless required, for instance due to a large amount of central framework laws as in Spain, regional party branches will be more inclined to follow a congruent logic in regional coalition building or policy-making if this could help to strengthen their access and influence at the statewide level. In such a context, to opt for a confrontational strategy is the more risky alternative.

Third, perhaps the most consistent centralizing logic within statewide parties stems from incumbency, especially when the party is in government at the central level. In this regard our findings entirely support the assumed hypotheses.

Finally, irrespective of where they stand on the left-right scale or how strong the regionalist competitors may be, the dominant strategy of statewide parties in regional elections is to evade the issue of regional autonomy and adapt a more regionalist profile by

playing the regional identity card instead. Only the case of the Welsh Conservatives provides some (temporary) evidence of a statewide party which adapted a centralist adversarial strategy in order to harm the success of Labour party against its most significant (and equally left-wing) competitor, Plaid Cymru.

Notwithstanding these findings, it is obvious that our work has only just begun and that many questions require further elaboration for which we hope we have ‘wetted’ the appetite of many political scientists.

For instance, we (re)considered the nationalization of the party system hypothesis with respect to Belgium, Spain and Germany. This analysis could be extended to include most of the other West European states. A comprehensive database should incorporate the ‘multi-level party systems’ for all West European federal or regionalized states, i.e. also include developments in the regional party systems and their interaction with the statewide party system. Similarly, we questioned the direction of Chhibber and Kollman’s (2004) assumed causal relationship between the (de)centralization of the state and the (de)nationalization of the statewide party system on the basis of the Belgian, German and Spanish examples. Also here, there is scope to test this relationship among a wider number of states. For instance, since early 2008, the scholarly community has access to a database which systematically measures patterns of authority migration for 42 democracies since 1950 (Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2008). The ‘regional authority index’ that is introduced in this study captures variations in the degree of shared and self rule for each of these 42 democracies. As such it is a more refined and arguably more accurate measurement of regional institutional power than indices that have relied solely on levels of regional expenditure decentralization (Rodden 2004). The regional authority indices (longitudinally and cross-nationally) could be linked to indices which capture the (de)nationalization of the multi-level party system, enabling a more

rigorous testing of the relationship between authority migration and the integration of the multi-level party system. Yet, our research agenda would not only be advanced by providing more large N statistical analyses of the type described above; testing for the effect of ideology, incumbency, the institutional environment in which the party was formed and developed on party strategy also requires delving into the complex network of intra-party relations and dynamics. Such studies require extensive elite interviewing and documental research, ideally on as vast a number of cases as possible.

To conclude, the study of territorial party politics in Western Europe and beyond has only just begun. We set the framework and the various contributions provided preliminary answers based on some of the most significant federal or regionalized states in Western Europe. The questions that were raised here show how the territorial dimension of party politics can be analyzed through a comparative framework and why scholars of party politics should not neglect the importance of this regional dimension, even if their scholarly interest remains with developments at the statewide level (or even supra-national) level alone.

ENDNOTES

Endnotes have now been moved to a separate section in front of the bibliography